

August 16, 2020
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Ephesians
Community Baptist Church
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THE WORTHY WALK AT HOME Ephesians 6:1-4

For four years, 2015-2018, the birth rate declined in America. Last year it picked up just a tick with a .09% increase, which means practically no increase. Demographers are surprised by this lower rate. In light of the booming economy (until Covid hit in early 2020), the experts predicted that the birthrate would pick up considerably. It hasn't. However, common-sense people are predicting a baby boom around the end of 2020 because of the lock downs and stay-at-home orders associated with the pandemic.

But, back to the facts, the lower birthrate over the past five years is insufficient to replenish the natural population decline due to death. Our birthrate is 16% below what is needed to keep the population level. Obviously, this is going to have a very negative effect on the available work force in less than twenty years.

An easy question to ask in light of current statistics is, "Why are couples not having babies?" The answer to that question is not easy to determine at all. We could propose any number of explanations that range from infertility to selfishness.

The question for us who make up the Church, which is the topic of focus in Paul's letter to the Ephesian Christians, is not so much, "Why are children not being born?" as it is "What are we doing for the children who are already here?" Children are a precious commodity. They are the future of the Church (universal and local). They are the future of the nation. They are so important and so necessary—which is a statement often overlooked or intentionally ignored by parents and even grandparents.

This week Pat and I have been privileged to have five of our nine grandchildren with us. At times it seemed like there were a

hundred of them. How can these little creatures make so much noise, require so much attention, and be so active? The other night the kids were getting ready to go to bed when the thought occurred to me that now the house would be quiet. Then another thought occurred to me. For about eight hours they are just going to recharge their batteries so they will be ready to go again tomorrow.

In all the hustle and bustle and endless noise and activity of child-rearing, it is pretty easy to lose sight of the goal God has already established for children and parents. There is a very good reason why God has included instruction about the child's relationship to the parent and the parents' relationship with their children in a letter about Church life. As we concluded in the past studies about husbands and wives in chapter five, families are an incredibly important part of the Church.

Knowing and doing the instruction God has given us about children and parents will facilitate the walk that is worthy of our calling. Putting this instruction to work will demonstrate to the world that people, who have received all the blessings in Christ explained in the first three chapters of Ephesians, are unique people indeed.

Children Obey (vv.1-3).

Our text begins with the command for children. God requires them to obey their parents. *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (vv.1-2a).* The command is plain and simple. What could be simpler than, *obey your parents?* Well, it doesn't always work out so simply. In an age of chaos and confusion, someone might ask like the lawyer who asked Jesus who his neighbor was, "Who is my parent?" That hypothetical question is a reminder that chaos, disorder, and dysfunction is Satan's plan and work, not God's. God our Creator is a God of order and that orderliness is defined, described, and established in the Bible. Reject, ignore, or view the Bible lightly and there will be chaos and disorder in the family.

Common sense determines that to obey is simply to follow orders or be subject to. However, the root meaning of the word means to listen to, hear, and then to respond to. For example in Acts 12:13 Peter was knocking on the door and Rhoda responded. She opened

the door (eventually). The word used in that narrative is the same word translated “obey” in our text. Rhoda’s response is a good example of what a child’s obedience looks like.

Many children are taught that they don’t need to respond to the parents’ requests, commands, or warnings. That is generally the parents’ fault as we will see in verse four of our study. God’s expectation is that when the parent speaks, the child responds. This is a present tense command not a recommendation, or suggestion, nor is it optional or occasional. It is God’s normal expectation. The child who does not respond to his or her parent is sinning against God.

That statement is so direct that it puts me in the category of radical, out of touch with modern life, and cave-manish. I must confess that I have been alive so long that I have been able to observe with my own eyes the devolution of parental authority in the American culture. When I was a child, most families were characterized by children showing respect and immediate obedience to parents. Those times when we saw a little child rebelling or arguing with a parent in the grocery store were quite rare. That is not a picture of modern life. A couple of years ago, I was almost aghast as I watched a three-year-old yell at, hit, and kick his parent in the airport. And the parent responded as if she was helpless against the attack. The whole picture shouted, “Ungodly!”

The scope of the command is not so easy to understand. The child is to obey his parents *in the Lord*. It is possible to interpret this phrase as a boundary, which would mean that the child must obey the parent only in matters that are fitting in the Lord’s will. That could be possible as a safeguard against obeying wicked, sinful commands from godless parents (and there are plenty of those).

However, it is more likely that this phrase is equivalent to the one in the command for wives to submit to their husbands *as to the Lord* (5:22). If so, the teaching here is that children are to obey their parents because of their own personal relationship with the Lord. Because it is the Lord’s command, the child is to take personal responsibility to carry it out in obedience to God first.

Another question might be, “What age constitutes children?” Granted, the word can refer to adult children such as Isaac who obeyed father Abraham though he could have been 40 years old. But under normal circumstances, and for obvious and practical reasons,

the child’s obedience must apply while the person is still living in the home under the authority of the parent.

That is not the case for the next requirement. God also requires the child to honor his parents with the command to, “*Honor your father and mother.*” This command shows up five times in Jesus’ teaching. It originally appears in the giving of God’s law to Moses where God said, “*Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*” (Exodus 20:12); the same command is repeated in Deuteronomy 5:16. The word in our text translated *honor* (*timao*) means to set a price on or to value. When applied to human relationships, it means to esteem and show respect.

The child who respects his or her parents will obey (respond to) the parents. This command does not diminish with age as the child becomes an adult and moves out of the house. Often this honor is demonstrated by literal, actual care when the aged parents are no longer able to care for themselves.

God has included a reason for obeying this command (both in our text and in the original Old Testament use). First, the child is to honor his parents because it is the right thing to do (v.1b). To assert that obedience and honor shown to parents is the right thing to do might very well result in someone in our culture asking, “According to who?” That is the important point. God said that this response is right and we will all give an account to God.

Instilling the attitude of obedience and honor in a child who is born in sin is to teach the fear of the Lord. That is why I often say that a person who is in rebellion against God will demonstrate that sin as rebellion against other God-ordained authorities.

A second reason it is good to obey and honor parents is because this is the first command with a promise (v.2b). Probably the word *command* is a reference to the Ten Commands. If so, then this is the only command of the Big Ten that has a promise connected to it. But there are other commands in the larger body of the law that have a promise attached. For example, the command in Exodus 23:11, “Let your fields lie fallow on the seventh year,” comes with the promise, “So that your poor will have something to eat.”

Furthermore, there are good results attached to this command. *That it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land*

(v.3). The original application was to the promise for the nation of Israel. God gave this law in the context of putting His chosen people into the Promised Land. God's intent was that each family would pass their piece of property down to the next generation. God's will was that His people would live in the land for a long time. The people didn't agree with God's will, do God's intent, or enjoy His promise.

The exact law does not fit our modern circumstances, but the principle applies to us. There really is a promise associated with a God-fearing, God-honoring family. Tranquil, respectful God-fearing families are a blessing. They offer a place of peace and security to children and parents alike. They are more likely to be physically healthy families. Solomon concluded, *A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot (Proverbs 14:30)*. They are the strength of the nation. *Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people (Proverbs 14:34)*. Healthy, tranquil families are the strength of the Church. How do we build this solid foundation of the home, the nation, the Church? Through hard, consistent, faithful work!

Parents Train (v.4).

The instruction to parents begins with a prohibition: *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger (v.4a)*. Though our text specifically uses the word "Fathers," this instruction is addressed to both parents in general. It is true that the term *fathers* recognizes the father as the head of the home. To that end, it holds him responsible to be sure that this training of the children takes place. But in all reality, the mother will do more of the training especially in the early years. This fits with God's plan for the husband to be the head of the home, but the wife to be the manager of the home. Therefore, the word "fathers" is broad enough to include both father and mother.

What are the parents to do? They are to refrain from frustrating children. So what does that mean? What does that command require? The word *provoke (parorgizo)* is used only here and in Romans 10:19 in the New Testament. In the Romans passage, we learn that God uses His love for the Gentiles to *provoke* the Jews, that is, to get their attention in order to see His great love.

We have already studied the root to the word (*orgizo*) as it was used in 4:26. *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger (Ephesians 4:26)*. Obviously, parents are able to cause their children to become angry and develop an attitude of anger (*parorgizoma – your anger*). Of course this is a double-edged sword just like many relationships in life. No parent is perfect and, therefore, no parent will teach, discipline, lead in perfect godliness.

However, even when a parent exasperates a child, the child (especially as he or she become adults) is not to sin by dishonoring the parent. That means that even children are responsible before God for how they respond.

But the focus of this statement is on the careless parent forcing a child into an angry disposition. The idea here is for the parent who makes the child feel he is being pushed into a tight spot from which there is no escape. It is how Job felt when he experienced God-ordained affliction but did not understand why. He exclaimed to God, *"What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him, visit him every morning and test him every moment? How long will you not look away from me?" (Job 7:17-19a)*. It is possible for a parent to drive a child to the conclusion that there is no way for him or her to please the parent. They can never do enough, obey enough, stay out of trouble enough.

How can a parent do this? Parents can present unwise expectations to their children or hold them to an unreasonable standard. The parent is responsible to know each child's temperament, abilities, limitations. Therefore, to demand straight "A's" from a "C" student is unreasonable. Or to demand that the child mow one acre of lawn with a push mower on a hot summer day is unwise.

Parents can also exasperate their kids when they make unfair comparisons. Comparing one child to another is to reveal that you don't understand each child's unique personality or characteristics. Comparing your child to the neighbor's child or to other children at school or church will make demands the child is not capable of accomplishing. Your child is not the same as your neighbor's child. Or we can even compare our children to ourselves (or what we think we were at their age).

Parents can do this same sin when they give too much attention to a child. We call them helicopter parents. They give their children no room to fail and thus to learn from their mistakes. It is as though the parent does not accept the possibility that the child might not achieve perfection. This is how Job felt.

Maybe the worst offense is when parents frustrate their children by living vicariously through them. Mom or Dad want to live out, through their kids, the dreams they never accomplished. That causes a child to resent the parent.

Typically, a parent will cause their children to sin in this way because of underlying sin issues in their own hearts. Maybe the parent senses great guilt for past sin and is bound and determined that their child will not go down that same road. Or many parents (even professing Christians) really are not in fellowship with Christ and are not growing to be more like Christ. Therefore, a fleshly parent will train and discipline with fleshly motives. Fleshly motives will generally be selfish goals.

That is quite contrary to God's plan of wisdom. Rather than frustrating our children, we are to *bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (v.4b)*. There are actually three parts to this positive command for helping the children.

First, the parent must bring them up. That is the word nourish. To nourish is to provide food for, to give food to someone for them to eat. It is the word that describes our love for our own bodies. We just studied last week, *For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church (Ephesians 5:29)*. If a person does not care for himself physically, emotionally, mentally, we consider them in need of professional help.

Implicit in this word is kindness and gentleness, which is stressed first. To nourish is vitally important as a balance and tempering attitude in discipline, which is the second part of the command. Discipline for our children should not be difficult to figure out because the our Heavenly Father disciplines us. In the Proverbs Solomon taught, *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights (Proverbs 3:11-12)*.

The word translated *discipline* is the word *paideuo* when we translate the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek. This word is

important because it shows up a lot, which helps us understand what disciplining children looks like. God requires parents to do the same kind of training for their children that He does to us. For example, *Discipline (paideuo) your son, for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death (Proverbs 19:18)*. Or *Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction (paideuo) shall drive it far from him (Proverbs 22:15)*. Or *Do not withhold discipline (paideuo) from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die (Proverbs 23:13)*. Or *Discipline (paideuo) your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart (Proverbs 29:17)*.

To modern ears this wisdom sounds harsh or uncaring. Surely, God did not mean for us to take that word literally. We must remember that when Pilate told the Jews regarding Jesus, *"I will therefore punish (paideuo) and release him"* (Luke 23:16) – he did not recommend a “time out” for Jesus.

This kind of work is even the pastor's responsibility in ministry: *Correcting (paideuo) his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth (2 Timothy 2:25)*. Again this is the same thing the Lord does for us: *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined (paideuo) so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32)*. *For the Lord disciplines (paideuo) the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline (paideuo) that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline (paideuo)?" (Hebrews 12:6-7)*.

Whatever form your correction or discipline takes, it must convey love, concern, and the desire for your child to be more like Christ.

Finally, the third aspect of the parents training children to be obedient and respectful requires that they instruct them. This purpose is demonstrated well by the Proverbs. Solomon began the collection with: *The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; (Proverbs 1:1-3)*. He wrote, *Hear, O sons, a father's instruction, and be attentive, that you may gain insight (Proverbs 4:1)*.

The word means to put admonition, instruction, warning into the minds of the children. The purpose of admonition, instruction and warning is to shape and correct the child's behavior. If the parent fails to acknowledge that each child comes to us sinful, selfish, creatures living the wrong way, the instruction will be deficient or inaccurate. Several years ago the Minnesota Crime Commission issued a report that affirms God's truth about children's natural condition. "Every baby starts life as a little savage. He is completely selfish and self-centered. He wants what he wants when he wants it: his bottle, his mother's attention, his playmate's toys, his uncle's watch, or whatever. Deny him these and he seethes with rage and aggressiveness which would be murderous were he not so helpless. He's dirty, he has no morals, no knowledge, no developed skills. This means that all children, not just certain children, but all children, are born delinquent. If permitted to continue in their self-centered world of infancy, given free reign to their impulsive actions to satisfy each want, every child would grow up a criminal, a thief, a killer, a rapist. (quoted by John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, "Ephesians," Chicago: The Moody Press, 1986, p.309)

God desires strong families. God uses strong families to make strong nations and strong churches. But building strong "anything" requires focus, a plan, a purpose, and faithful, dedicated execution of the plan. Being a child who honors God through obedience and honor to the parents is not natural. It requires training. The most natural people and God-ordained people to apply that training are the parents.